The Commonwealth of Massachusetts In the One Hundred and Ninety-Fifth General Court (2027-2028) **An Act establishing the Western Massachusetts Regional Transit (WMRTA), Central Montachusett Regional Transit Authority (CMRTA) and Commonwealth Housing Authority (CHA), guaranteeing universal basic income, and providing for comprehensive infrastructure and human rights protections.** *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives in General Court assembled, and by the authority of the same, as follows:*

SECTION 1.) TRANSIT CONSOLIDATION & EXPANSION

Chapter 161B of the General Laws is hereby amended by inserting after Section 32 the following new sections:— **Section 33.** The Franklin Regional Transit Authority (FRTA), the Pioneer Valley Transit Authority (PVTA) and the Berkshire Regional Transit Authority (BRTA) are hereby merged into a single consolidated entity known as the **Western Massachusetts Regional Transit Authority** (WMRTA). The WMRTA shall assume all assets, liabilities, and operational jurisdictions of the formerly separate entities. The Montachusett Regional Transit Authority and the Worcester Regional Transit Authority are similarly consolidated and shall be known as the Central Montachusett Regional Transit Authority. **Section 34.** The WMRTA shall expand the former FRTA ACCESS program to encompass Hampshire and Hampden counties in addition to all USPS-listed street addresses in Franklin County. Existing FRTA service hours and frequencies for fixed-route and ACCESS services shall be expanded. The minimum advanced scheduling notice for ACCESS service is hereby reduced from 3 hours to 1 hour and the agency shall be permitted to operate services directly and accept any method of payment, including Credit/Debit/Benefit cards, cash and Promissory Notes, as well as to offer such services free.

SECTION 2.) HOUSING AS A HUMAN RIGHT

Chapter 40 of the General Laws is hereby amended by inserting after Section 8N the following new section: - **Section 8O**. Hereby there is established the Commonwealth Housing Authority (CHA).

The CHA is authorized to plan, build, and maintain subsidized public housing to address unmet regional housing demand. Notwithstanding the provisions of Chapter 40P of the General Laws, or any other general or special law to the contrary, the CHA shall possess the explicit, preemptive statutory authority to enact, administer, and enforce regulations to stabilize market rents within its jurisdiction.

The CHA shall provide immediate housing to indigent and homeless individuals without means testing or other restrictive criteria, codifying housing as a fundamental human right. Continued tenancy shall be subject solely to an expectation of reasonable safety in conduct and actual presence in a subsidized domicile.

SECTION 3.) UNIVERSAL BASIC INCOME PILOT

The Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA) shall administer a Universal Basic Income (UBI) pilot program for eligible residents of the Commonwealth.

(a) The program guarantees a total monthly income of up to $1,500, with a guaranteed minimum monthly income of at least $1,200.

(b) Distribution shall not be subject to means testing, except for the required deduction of existing government cash benefits, including SSI/SSDI. Amounts received through EBT or WIC programs are strictly excluded from this calculation.

(c) The disbursement amount shall be indexed to the Consumer Price Index (CPI), adjusted annually at the conclusion of each fiscal year.

(d) If the Commonwealth provides housing accommodations to a UBI recipient, no more than 25 percent of the guaranteed or actually received income may be deducted in exchange for said accommodations.

(e) Eligibility for MassHealth and other government aid shall not consider amounts received under this program for the purposes of income eligibility programs, except for SSDI/SSI.

SECTION 4.) INFRASTRUCTURE AUTHORIZATION

The Commonwealth authorizes the study, construction, and upgrade of public transportation, bicycle, and pedestrian infrastructures under the auspices of any state, regional, district, or municipal agency, provided a bona fide public purpose is reasonably established. Authorized improvements include: expanded and more frequent bus service; heated bus shelters; grade-separated and dedicated bicycle and pedestrian pathways; maintenance of historic sites and parks, including heritage railway operations; and the expansion of intercity and commuter rail services.

SECTION 5.) FUNDING & TAXATION

Chapter 64H of the General Laws is hereby amended by inserting the following new section: Section 2A. To fund the mandates, pilot programs, and infrastructure authorizations of the Valley Commons Act, executing agencies shall first exhaust all available Federal grants, followed by existing Commonwealth revenue sources. Upon exhaustion, and notwithstanding any general or special law to the contrary, a fixed statewide sales tax surcharge of between 1 and 3 cents per United States dollar (based on the discretion of the WMPC) is hereby imposed upon all non-exempt taxable sales within the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. The revenues generated

by this statewide surcharge shall be deposited directly into the Valley Commons Transit and Infrastructure Trust Fund, to be disbursed by the Western Massachusetts Planning Commission (WMPC) in accordance with the empirical statistical benefit formulas defined in Section 6..

SECTION 6.) PLANNING COMMISSION CHAIR & OMBUDSMAN GENERAL

There is hereby established the position of the Western Massachusetts Office of the Ombudsman General (WMOG) as an officer of the Western Massachusetts Planning Commission (WMPC), which shall be created through the merger of the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission, Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Committee, Montachusett Regional Planning Association and the Berkshire Regional Planning Commission and who shall act as liaison to the public and respond to comments. The WMPC shall be construed as the executive authority in relation to projects construed from this legislation and led by a Chairperson. Projects in the Greater Boston area shall be overseen by the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) and/or the Boston Regional Metropolitan Planning Association (MPO). Each subregion shall retain its representatives on the new supra-regional WMPC and there shall be established a position of liaison in each of the three remaining planning associations.

(a) The WMPC shall oversee the distribution of revenue and prioritize projects based on empirical statistical benefits. The WMPC retains the authority to sequence the disbursement of funds but may not outright deny funds to eligible municipal or district projects.

(b) Subject to legislative parameters, the WMPC shall determine the exact regional sales tax surcharge (between 1 and 3 cents per United States dollar) based on a published statutory formula calculating regional cost-of-living metrics, inflation, and public financial well-being.

(c) The WMPC may propose independently submitted projects and, following public hearings, fund them using the same criteria applied to municipal requests.

(d) The WMPC is authorized to seek and accept credit on behalf of the district against projected revenues to ensure project liquidity.

SECTION 7.) ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW BOUNDARIES

The Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (MassDEP) retains authority to evaluate the environmental impact of projects authorized herein. MassDEP may mandate

demonstrable environmental alterations; however, such modifications shall not necessitate the outright termination of a project, except where termination is strictly required to maintain compliance with federal law, including the Clean Water Act and Clean Air Act.

SECTION 8.) UNIVERSAL SANCTUARY & MUNICIPAL SUFFRAGE

(a) **Anti-Commandeering & Sanctuary:** Exercising the Commonwealth's rights under the Tenth Amendment to the United States Constitution, no state or local funds, personnel, or facilities shall be used to assist Federal Immigration Authorities in removal operations. All agreements under 8 U.S.C. Section 287(g) within the Commonwealth are hereby terminated. Non-compliance with federal immigration detainers by local officials is statutorily indemnified by the Commonwealth.

(b) **Local Suffrage Expansion:** Notwithstanding any general law to the contrary, municipalities within the Commonwealth are hereby granted blanket authorization to enact local ordinances permitting noncitizen residents and persons aged 14 years or older, who have resided in the municipality for at least one year, to vote in *municipal* elections.

SECTION 9.) HUMAN RIGHTS FRAMEWORK

The United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UNDHR) is hereby adopted as the guiding framework of legislative intent for the Commonwealth. To the maximum extent permitted by the Supremacy Clause of the United States Constitution, the courts of the Commonwealth shall construe the General Laws to be in harmony with the UNDHR. In the event of a conflict between this Act and existing General Laws, this Act shall prevail, subject only to the Constitutions of the Commonwealth and the United States.

SECTION 10.) PROJECT PRIORITIZATION

Funding shall be prioritized for the earliest projected tax revenue stream for the following projects, to be administered by MassDOT in partnership with the Planning Commissions:

(a) Infrastructure and track upgrades for the 'Compass Rail' and 'Northern Tier Passenger Rail' projects.

(b) Subsidies for increased service frequency and extension of the Valley Flyer, including options to contract with CT Rail and/or Amtrak for additional round trips between Brattleboro, Springfield, and points South, with an objective of hourly service.

(c) New bus routes integrating the merged WMRTA service areas, and increased Link413 service frequency (including weekend service).

(d) Coordinated links with the MOOver bus in Southern Vermont and New Hampshire.

(e) Acquisition for and relocation of Amtrak facilities in Northampton and Holyoke to historic Union Stations, and reconstruction of South Deerfield, Old Deerfield and Northfield passenger rail stations on original sites.

(f) Study of new passenger rail service via Amherst, Northfield, and Belchertown between New London and Brattleboro along the existing rail corridor therethrough.

(g) Robust indoor regional rail stations with bathrooms, guaranteeing the study of at least one alternative to reconstruct an exact replica or homage to a historical transportation structure, alongside temperature controlled bus shelters on all Western Massachusetts routes.

(h) Funding for the study and construction for the extension of heritage rail facilities in Shelburne Falls to Buckland as a hybrid museum/public transit line, including a Northern Tier passenger station at Shelburne, and a pilot heritage rail operation to be operated jointly by the WMRTA and the Shelburne Falls Trolley Museum (SFTM) utilizing existing abandoned railroad right-of-way and historic trolley routes between Shelburne, Buckland, Colrain, Conway, and South Deerfield including but not limited to the abandoned New York, New Haven & Hartford Railroad Shelburne Falls Branch, Conway Station Road, and public easements shared with automobile traffic where existing private right-of way does not exist.

(i) Study and conversion of known high-ridership bus routes to light rail, beginning with former PVTA Route 30 and FRTA Route 31; These shall be studied and constructed as modern light rail lines utilizing existing/abandoned rail right-of-way or the acquisition of new easements;

  (a) Between Greenfield, Deerfield, Hatfield, Whately, Amherst and Northampton.

  (b) Between Sunderland/South Deerfield, Amherst, Hadley, Northampton, Easthampton, & Holyoke.

  (c) Between Amherst and Springfield Union Station via South Hadley and ‘The Notch’.

(j) Evaluation, planning and construction of portions of or expansions of former regional street railways (Berkshire, Springfield, Holyoke/Northampton, Connecticut Valley, and Ware & Brookfield Street Railways) as light rail, utilizing network-effect modeling and transit-oriented development under the CHA.

(k) Planning and execution for the removal of Interstate 91 through Springfield.

(l) Light rail and bikeway expansion to area colleges, including community colleges.

(m) Completion of the Franklin County Bikeway as a grade or barrier separated bikeway along Route 116 and the Connecticut River between the Sunderland Bridge and the Turners Falls Bikeway.

(n) The study and construction of 'Rail with Trail' projects including but not limited to the reactivation of the Central Massachusetts Railroad in parallel with the Norwottuck/Central Massachusetts Rail Trail, the Ashuwillticook Rail Trail and other existing "railbanked" properties.

(o) The Massachusetts Department of Transportation, in coordination with the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority, shall initiate a comprehensive statewide passenger rail electrification program. This program shall transition the commonwealth's passenger rail network from diesel-powered locomotives to electrified rolling stock. Subject to appropriation, funding is hereby authorized for the installation of overhead catenary systems, substation construction, and the procurement of electric multiple units and electric locomotives.

(p) The Massachusetts Department of Transportation is hereby authorized and directed to construct the North-South Rail Link, a subterranean rail connection seamlessly linking North Station and South Station in the city of Boston, to permit the through-routing of commuter and intercity passenger rail services. Subject to appropriation, revenues from this act may hereby be authorized for the design, excavation, and construction of the rail link and associated underground platforms.

(q) Subject to appropriation, funding from this act is hereby authorized and directed to the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority for the architectural and structural reconstruction of the historical facade of North Union Station in the city of Boston, restoring the public concourse and exterior to its original historical specifications while accommodating modern transit operations.

(r) Restoration of the 'Huckleberry Trolley Line' for light rail use between Springfield and Pittsfield, Massachusetts.

(s) Restoration of passenger rail service to Hinsdale, New Hampshire via the abandoned Boston & Maine branch thereto.

(t) Study and construction of new intercity passenger rail service between Fitchburg, Lawrence, Worcester, Massachusetts and Providence, Rhode Island via Ayer and Lowell, Massachusetts and Woonsocket, Rhode Island in partnership with RIDOT.

(u) Restoration of intercity passenger rail service to the village of Turners Falls, Montague, Massachusetts which is hereby renamed Peskeomscut.

(v) Upgrades, maintenance and expansions to the MBTA subway, light rail and bus systems at the discretion of regional planners and MassDOT.

(w) An additional hybrid 'heritage rail as functional public transportation' pilot program in Lowell, Massachusetts to be developed and operated by the Seashore Trolley Museum, MassDOT & the MBTA in partnership with the U.S. National Park Service.

(x) Expansion of MBTA intercity T service or light rail service from Fall River to Newport, Rhode Island using the historic disused rail corridor between those points and restoration of MBTA service along the disused Dighton Branch line and Taunton Branch.

(y) Acquisition, preservation and reconstruction of any other disused or freight-only rail corridors in the Commonwealth for future passenger rail use.

(z) (**RUSH**) Resolved, the Massachusetts Department of Transportation shall conduct a feasibility study on extending the MBTA Orange Line from Oak Grove in Malden to Roslindale Village in Boston. The study shall evaluate projected capital and operating costs, revenue, ridership, right-of-way usage, environmental and community impacts, potential funding sources, regional equity, and overall socio-economic benefits to the region. The department shall file its report with the House and Senate clerks, the committees on Ways and Means, and the Joint Committee on Transportation within 120 days of this act's passage.

Provided further, that if this or any other study determines a project listed above or emergent from the act is feasible, said project shall be eligible for funding under this act.

SECTION 11.) MBTA SERVICE AREA EXPANSION

Chapter 161A of the General Laws, as appearing in the 2022 Official Edition, is hereby amended by inserting after section 5 the following section:-

Section 5C. (a) Except as otherwise provided in this section, the authority shall not restrict passenger rail service to the area constituting the authority.

(b) Notwithstanding subsection (a) or any other general or special law to the contrary, the authority is authorized and directed to operate commuter rail service throughout the commonwealth. Such statewide commuter rail operations shall be implemented and managed as a supplement to state-supported Amtrak services planned or existing within the commonwealth

(c) In operating the commuter rail system, the authority shall ensure that at least hourly passenger service is provided on all commuter rail lines presently open and operating as of the effective date of this act.

SECTION 12.) RURAL SCHOOL EMERGENCY GAP FUNDING (COMERFORD)

The following shall be overseen and administered by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) on behalf of the Western Massachusetts Planning Commission where not specified otherwise or devolved to district control. All funds dispersed should be accounted for and reported as expenditure filings made to the Ombudsman General.

(a) **Definitions**: As used in this section, the following terms have the following meanings, unless the context clearly requires otherwise:– **Eligible Rural School District:** Any local school department, regional school district, or independent vocational school that is wholly or partially located within the jurisdiction of Western Massachusetts and meets the eligibility criteria set forth in line item 7061-9813 of the General Appropriations Act. These criteria

include having a student density of not more than 35 students per square mile and an average annual per capita income that does not exceed the average annual per capita income for the Commonwealth. **Level Service Budget:** A projected fiscal year operating budget that calculates the precise financial cost required to maintain the same programmatic, instructional staffing, and operational services as in the immediately preceding fiscal year. This budget is adjusted solely for macroeconomic inflation, fixed contractual cost increases, and legally mandated special education or transportation obligations. "**Demonstrated Funding Gap"**: This refers to the mathematical financial shortfall that occurs when an Eligible Rural School District's calculated Level Service Budget surpasses the sum of its anticipated Chapter 70 State Aid, mandated Minimum Required Local Contributions, accessible Federal entitlements (including Title I and IDEA Part B), and the maximum feasible Additional Local Contributions within the statutory levy limits of Proposition 2 ½ (MGL c. 59, § 21C).

(b) **Establishment of the Western Massachusetts Educational Gap Fund**: The Western Massachusetts Educational Gap Fund is hereby established and administered by DESE on behalf of the Western Massachusetts Planning Commission (WMPC). After exhausting the mandatory funding hierarchies outlined in Section 5 of this Act, and operating concurrently with the funding of Priority Projects designated in Section 10, DESE is authorized and directed to allocate a specific percentage of the collected regional sales tax surcharge directly to this Fund to ensure regional educational stability.

(c) **As-Needed Disbursement Protocols**: The WMPC is responsible for disbursing capital to DESE for the Educational Gap Fund to Eligible Rural School Districts on a per-request basis in an order determinable by demonstrated need, followed by date of requirements communicated. To qualify for disbursement, a district must submit an independently audited fiscal report to DESE that unequivocally demonstrates a Demonstrated Funding Gap that poses a threat to the provision of a Level Service Budget for the upcoming fiscal year.

(d) **Evaluation and Allocation Sequence**: The WMPC shall evaluate all applications for educational gap funding using the empirical statistical parameters outlined in Section 6(a) of this Act. The priority sequencing for educational disbursements shall closely align with the Commonwealth's Rural School Aid priority tiers established by DESE. Priority 1 funding will be allocated to districts experiencing the highest levels of geographic isolation (serving fewer than 11 students per square mile), Priority 2 to districts serving between 11 and 21 students per square mile, and Priority 3 to districts serving between 21 and 35 students per square mile. While the WMPC retains the authority to sequence these disbursements, it cannot outright deny funds to an Eligible Rural School District if a valid Demonstrated Funding Gap is proven and sufficient capital exists within the Fund.

(e) **Maintenance of Effort (MOE) and Anti-Supplantation Provision**: Maintain the current level of effort (MOE) and ensure that the district does not replace existing programs with redundant efforts, to be overseen by DESE and the Ombudsman General.

Funds allocated from the Western Massachusetts Educational Gap Fund are intended to supplement, not replace, the Required Local Contribution or existing Additional Local Contributions of any member municipality. Allocated gap funds may be deposited in a municipal or regional district account or otherwise dispensed pursuant to existing district procedures without restrictions except as already stipulated by existing law.

Upon dispersement, funds may be dispensed or spent without further action or authorization from the appropriating authority or the Commonwealth so long as reasonable accounting and reporting requirements are observed and reported to DESE.

SECTION 13.) CENTRAL MONTACHUSETT RTA LIGHT RAIL STUDIES

To provide for the restoration of historic transit corridors, the Central Montachusett Regional Transit Authority (as absorbed into the new CMRTA) in partnership with the MetroWest Regional Transit Authority, and under the supervision of the Massachusetts Department of Transportation, is hereby authorized and directed to plan, design, construct, and operate modern light rail transit systems along the historic alignments of: (a) The Northern Massachusetts Street Railway; (b) The Worcester Consolidated and (c) Fitchburg & Leominster Street Railways. Subject to appropriation of funds under this act, the sums are hereby authorized for the purposes of land acquisition, design, track construction, electrification, and procurement of rolling stock for these light rail networks.

SECTION 14.) MIDDLESEX TRANSIT DESERT & BOSTON COMMUTER EXURBS

Chapter 161A of the General Laws is hereby amended by inserting after section 5C the following 3 sections:– Section 5D. The authority shall plan, design, construct, and operate a modern light rail transit system along the historic alignment of the Concord, Maynard & Hudson Street Railway. The authority shall integrate this light rail service into the existing rapid transit and commuter rail networks. Subject to appropriation, funding is hereby authorized for the reconstruction and operation of this line. Section 5E. The authority is authorized and directed to implement an immediate expansion of its bus service network within Middlesex county. Such expansion shall establish direct, high-frequency bus connections between the authority's commuter rail stations and adjacent population and job centers that are presently unserved or underserved by public transportation. Section 5F. Notwithstanding any general or special law to the contrary, the authority shall have the power to enter into interstate compacts, operating agreements, and cost-sharing agreements with the State of New Hampshire, the State of Maine, the State of Vermont, the State of New York, the State of Connecticut, The State of Rhode Island or any political subdivision thereof, for the purpose of extending the authority's passenger rail services to population centers in the cities including but not limited to; Keene, Concord,

Portsmouth and Manchester, New Hampshire; Brunswick, Kittery, York County, Kennebunkport and Portland, Maine; Brattleboro and Montpelier, Vermont; Albany, Troy, Schenectady, Boston Corner/Wassiac, Poughkeepsie or Rensselaer, New York; Providence and Woonsocket, Rhode Island; Hartford, New Haven, New London, Danbury, Waterbury and Windsor, Connecticut.

SECTION 15.) CAPE FLYER EXTENSION & IMPROVEMENT (FERNANDES)

The Massachusetts Department of Transportation shall conduct a feasibility study relative to restoring commuter rail service to Buzzards Bay station and beyond to Provincetown utilizing a 'Rail With Trail' model of service delivery preserving the existing public bicycle usage of the corridor, through the town of Bourne and other towns formerly served by the disused railroad corridor to Provincetown.

(a) The study shall examine and evaluate the feasibility and benefits of such a project.

(b) The department shall file the report with the clerks of the house and senate, the chairs of the house and senate committee on ways and means and the senate and house chairs of the joint committee on transportation not later than 12 months after this section takes effect.

(c) Should a favorable outlook on project feasibility be reported back as the result of public outreach and studies, funding may be allocated for the construction of preferred alternative(s) identified in studies.

SECTION 16.) REGIONAL TRANSIT AUTHORITY BUS ELECTRIFICATION

Chapter 161B of the General Laws, as appearing in the 2022 Official Edition, is hereby amended in Section 1 by inserting the following definition:— "*Electric vehicles,*" shall mean those conveyances utilizing electric motors exclusively for propulsion, encompassing all manner of non-combustion transit technology. Section 6 of said Chapter 161B is hereby further amended by inserting after paragraph (r) the following new paragraph:— (s) Regional transit authorities shall deploy electric vehicles, prioritizing the operation of such equipment upon routes serving environmental justice populations as defined by Section 62 of Chapter 30.

(a) Authorities are directed to engage in comprehensive community outreach with local residents, municipal leadership, and advocates for environmental and transportation justice. A total transition to electrified fleets shall be realized by no later than December 31, 2035, adhering to the following procurement benchmarks:

(b) The Secretary, acting in concert with the executive office for administration and finance, shall mandate that new vehicle acquisitions by the authorities consist of electric units

according to this schedule: (i) 40 per cent of acquisitions by 2028; (ii) 60 per cent by 2030; and (iii) 80 per cent by 2032.

(c) The authorities shall submit annual progress reports to the Regional Transit Authority Council regarding fleet electrification. Such public disclosures shall detail any fossil fuel-dependent infrastructure or vehicles acquired during the period, providing rigorous justification for the procurement of internal combustion technology in lieu of zero-emission alternatives.

(d) Chapter 161B is hereby amended by inserting after Section 27 the following new section:— Section 28. The Department of Transportation shall establish a central planning and procurement office by December 31, 2027. This office shall provide technical, grant-writing, and worker retraining support to facilitate the electric bus rollout plans as required by Chapter 179 of the Acts of 2022 for each regional authority by June 30, 2027.

(e) The Department shall offer assistance to personnel whose employment is impacted by the transition to electrified transit, including free vocational retraining and placement services. Labor engaged for the design and maintenance of said infrastructure shall be compensated at the prevailing wage, governed by project labor agreements, and employers shall maintain neutrality regarding unionization efforts.

The Department, in consultation with the executive office of energy and environmental affairs, shall identify and pursue all available revenue sources and Federal grant opportunities to ensure the penetration of electric vehicle technology throughout the Commonwealth in alignment with Chapter 21N.

SECTION 17.) UNIVERSAL MICROTRANSIT (RUSH, MCMURTRY, ROGERS)

(a) Chapter 161A of the General Laws is hereby amended by inserting after Section 49 the following new section:— **Section 50.** Notwithstanding any general or special law to the contrary, the authority is directed to expand 'The Ride' paratransit operations to include all 175 municipalities within its statutory jurisdiction.

(b) The authority shall further eliminate all restrictive eligibility criteria, including those based on disability, age, or medical status, ensuring the service is universally accessible to all residents throughout the service area.

(c) Chapter 161B of the General Laws is hereby amended by inserting after Section 34 the following new section:—**Section 35.** The MetroWest Regional Transit Authority (MWRTA) is authorized to expand the 'Catch Connect' microtransit service across all member municipalities.

(d) The Central Montachusett Regional Transit Authority (CMRTA), established in Section 33, shall similarly deploy and integrate 'Catch Connect' across its consolidated jurisdiction, including all municipalities previously served by the Montachusett and Worcester regional transit authorities.

(e) Revenues from the statewide sales tax surcharge deposited into the Valley Commons Transit and Infrastructure Trust Fund, pursuant to Section 5, are hereby authorized for the planning, capital procurement, and operational subsidization necessary to realize the universal expansion of 'The Ride' and 'Catch Connect' services as mandated herein.

(f) Notwithstanding the universal expansion mandated in this section, the authority and the regional transit authorities shall unequivocally guarantee and enshrine the existing rights of service access for passengers with disabilities.

(g) The universal expansion of 'The Ride' and 'Catch Connect' shall strictly supplement, and must not occur at the expense of, existing access by disabled passengers. The authorities are strictly prohibited from engaging in any operational pattern or practice that significantly limits the availability of service to federal Americans with Disabilities Act paratransit eligible persons.

(h) Furthermore, the Massachusetts Office on Disability (MOD) shall ensure continued access for these protected groups by establishing and implementing a riders' bill of rights that guarantees safe, reliable, timely, and efficient transportation, as well as on-time pickups and properly equipped vehicles throughout the Commonwealth.

SECTION 18.) COMMONWEALTH RAIL VISION & OBJECTIVES (SABADOSA)

The secretary of transportation is hereby empowered and directed to formulate, negotiate, and execute interstate compacts on behalf of the Commonwealth in coordination with the states of Connecticut, New York, and Vermont, or their respective agencies, to achieve the following mandates:

(a) The objective of such compacts, facilitated by the cooperative action of the signatory states, shall be to:
   (i) Institute enduring commuter rail operations between the municipalities of New Haven and Brattleboro, featuring intermediate station stops in Springfield, Holyoke, Northampton, and Greenfield;
   (ii) Authorize permanent commuter rail service connecting the cities of Worcester and Albany, with station stops in Palmer, Springfield, Chester, and Pittsfield;
   (iii) Facilitate the northward extension of the New Haven-Hartford-Springfield Rail Program along the Knowledge Corridor through the aforementioned regional centers; and
   (iv) Engage in the public promotion of robust regional rail networks linking the four counties of Western Massachusetts to the metropolitan hubs of Albany, Boston, Hartford, and New Haven to ensure the long-term viability of the district's transit infrastructure.

(b) It is the express policy of the compacting states that all activities undertaken by any resultant interstate commissions constitute the formation of public policy and shall be conducted as public business. The compacting states shall collectively uphold their responsibilities to ensure the successful implementation of established programs. The provisions of this section shall be liberally construed to fulfill the legislative intent and purposes of the compact.

SECTION 19.) FREIGHT LOCOMOTIVE IDLING LIMITATIONS (BARRETT, III)

Chapter 21A of the General Laws is hereby amended by inserting after Section 27 the following new section:— **Section 28.** No individual or entity shall permit, suffer, or cause any locomotive engine to remain in an idling state for a period exceeding 30 consecutive minutes.

(a) The department of environmental protection is hereby directed to investigate all grievances regarding locomotive idling beyond said temporal limit. In the course of such investigations, the department shall perform rigorous emission testing to quantify the release of carbon dioxide, nitrogen oxides, carbon monoxides, and sulfur dioxide from the subject locomotive.

(b) Recorded emission concentrations shall not surpass the baseline levels established for Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority rolling stock, as previously codified by the United States Environmental Protection Agency. Upon a finding that such emission thresholds have been breached, the offending party shall be subject to a civil administrative penalty of not less than $5,000 for each distinct occurrence.

(c) Limitations established by this section and its amendments shall not apply to trains powered by electric or other zero emission locomotives, or to passenger trains with occupants on board, except as required by federal law.

SECTION 20.) BOSTON COMMONS MUNICIPAL ACCOUNT

Chapter 44 of the General Laws is hereby amended by inserting after Section 53K the following new section:–**Section 53L**. Notwithstanding the provisions of section 53, any city or town may, upon the approval of its chief executive officer, establish in the treasury of the city or town a separate revenue account to be known as the Boston Commons Municipal Account.

(a) Into this account shall be deposited all monies disbursed to the municipality from the Valley Commons Transit and Infrastructure Trust Fund.

(b) An account established pursuant to this section shall be maintained by the treasurer of the city or town and shall be kept strictly separate and apart from all other municipal general funds.

(c) Monies in such account may be expended at the direction of the chief executive officer of the city or town, or their authorized designee, without further appropriation, exclusively for the purposes for which the monies were disbursed under the Valley Commons Act.

SECTION 21.) USAGE OF MUNICIPAL ACCOUNT REVENUE & ACCESS THERETO

Notwithstanding any general or special law to the contrary, revenues deposited into the Valley Commons Transit and Infrastructure Trust Fund, established in Section 5 of this Act, are hereby authorized to be disbursed directly to municipal transportation departments and public works agencies for the express public purposes of:

(a) Mitigating operational, cyclical, and structural budgetary shortfalls within municipal transportation departments;

(b) Funding local transportation project feasibility studies, engineering, and design;

(c) Executing the construction, rehabilitation, and preventative maintenance of municipal transit, pedestrian, bicycle, and roadway infrastructure.

(d) Procedural Trigger and Elected Official Mandate: Disbursements authorized under this section shall be initiated exclusively upon the formal, written request of a municipality's elected officials.

(e) For the purposes of this section, "*elected officials*" shall be explicitly defined as the Mayor and City Council in a city form of government, the Town Council in a town lacking a town meeting, or the Select Board in a town utilizing an open or representative town meeting form of government.

(f) All formal requests shall be submitted to the Western Massachusetts Planning Commission (WMPC), the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC), or the relevant regional Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) holding geographical jurisdiction over the requesting municipality.

(g) Anti-Supplantation and Maintenance of Effort (MOE): All funds disbursed under this section shall be strictly utilized to supplement, and shall in no instance supplant, existing municipal appropriations for transportation operations, maintenance, and infrastructure development. To qualify for shortfall mitigation funding under subsection (a), the requesting elected officials must submit to the relevant planning commission an independently audited fiscal report establishing a "*Demonstrated Funding Gap.*"

(h) A Demonstrated Funding Gap is legally established when the municipality's calculated Level Service Budget for transportation operations—adjusted solely for macroeconomic inflation, fixed contractual wage increases, and documented supply cost escalation—mathematically exceeds the maximum feasible municipal appropriation available within the statutory levy limits of Proposition 2½ (M.G.L. c. 59, § 21C).

(i) If a municipality intentionally reduces its proportional baseline general fund appropriation for transportation services compared to the immediately preceding fiscal year, absent a proportionate reduction in total municipal revenue, it shall be deemed in violation of the Maintenance of Effort requirement and shall be rendered ineligible for any shortfall disbursements under this section.

SECTION 22.) STATUTORY PROJECT PRIORITIZATION

The WMPC, MAPC, and relevant regional MPOs shall evaluate, sequence, and disburse funding for requests submitted under this section with equal prioritization to all other general infrastructure projects eligible for funding under Section 4 of this Act.

Provided, however, that this equal prioritization mandate shall remain strictly subordinate to the statutory project earmarks explicitly designated in Section 10, subsections (a) through (z) of this Act.

The projects enumerated in Section 10 (a) through (z) shall retain preemptive statutory priority for the earliest projected tax revenue streams, and funds shall not be diverted to elsewhere if such diversion would delay the execution, capitalization, or liquidity of aforesaid earmarks.

SECTION 23.) AIRPORTS TRANSPORTATION ACCESS IMPROVEMENT

Chapter 161B of the General Laws is hereby amended by inserting after Section 34 the following new provisions governing inter-regional transit infrastructure and insular transit operations, utilizing funds collected pursuant to the Valley Commons Act:

(a) Interstate Airport Rail Link: The Commonwealth, acting through MassDOT and in coordination with the MBTA, shall fully fund comprehensive feasibility studies and the subsequent construction of a light rail and integrated transit network. This network shall form a continuous intermodal corridor linking Bradley International Airport (*Windsor Locks, Connecticut*) and Boston Logan International Airport, physically integrating with existing Amtrak, CT Rail, and MBTA facilities, respectively.

(b) Whereas Bradley International Airport (BIA) is situated outside the Commonwealth's jurisdiction, matching funds for the Bradley connection segment shall actively be sought from the federal government and/or the State of Connecticut. However, recognizing that BIA is the closest airport geographically to the Western portion of the Commonwealth, the requirement for matching funds may be overridden at the sole discretion of the WMPC, should such an override be deemed necessary to expedite project delivery.

SECTION 24.) BARNSTABLE & DUKES TRANSPORTATION ACCESS

A dedicated, continuous subsidy from the Valley Commons Act shall be apportioned to rectify documented service deficiencies, improve inter-island coordination, and fund necessary transportation improvements on and between Nantucket and Martha's Vineyard.

This includes capital and operational funding for the Woods Hole, Martha’s Vineyard and Nantucket Steamship Authority, the Martha's Vineyard Transit Authority (VTA), and the Nantucket Regional Transit Authority (NRTA) to enhance bus and ferry services.

(a) The VTA shall implement, operate, and maintain a comprehensive, on-demand ride service accessible to all United States Postal Service (USPS) listed addresses located on Martha's Vineyard. This service shall be strictly modeled upon the NRTA’s existing "*Wave On-Demand*" program. The VTA is hereby designated as the sole statutory operator of this new service.

(b) Both the NRTA fixed/on-demand systems and the newly mandated VTA on-demand system shall operate daily between the hours of 5:00 a.m. and midnight. On Friday and Saturday nights, operations for both authorities shall be extended until 2:30 a.m.

(c) These extended hours shall be enforced year-round, except during the winter season, defined for the purposes of this section as December 1st through March 31st.

(d) VCA funds shall be explicitly authorized to exclusively study the implementation, restoration, or expansion of historic trolley services on Nantucket, Martha's Vineyard, Cape Cod, and the City of Fall River.

(c) Old Colony Railroad Commuter Restoration: MassDOT and the MBTA shall study and fully fund the extension of the MBTA Commuter Rail network to Falmouth and elsewhere not presently served by rail. These rail extensions shall preferentially utilize the historical right-of-way alignments of the Old Colony Railroad.

Any project duly studied under this act may receive funding under it in accordance with any recommendation or alternatives provided therefrom, provided federal funds and funds from other Commonwealth revenue sources are sought when available.

SECTION 25.) This act shall take effect upon its passage.